

Good afternoon. My name is Ron McNamara and I am serving as the Deputy Chief of Staff of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe. Today's briefing is being held in advance of a series of meetings that will take place next week in Rome, hosted by the Italian parliament, in conjunction with the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. On October 11, a day-long "Forum on the Mediterranean" will take place. Sessions will be held on: "Strengthening Security in the Mediterranean" and "Developing the OSCE Mediterranean Dimension." "Democracy and Human Rights"--the topic of today's briefing--is part of the agenda.

By way of background, there has been a Mediterranean dimension of the Helsinki process from the outset. Throughout the negotiations that preceded and produced the Helsinki Final Act, issues relating to the Mediterranean were discussed. The result was a section of the Final Act entitled "Questions relating to Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean." Under the rubric of "non-participating Mediterranean countries" Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Syria and Tunisia contributed to relevant discussions in the security dimension. These discussions were held in recognition of the relationship between security in Europe and in the Mediterranean region.

The Mediterranean dimension of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe was reconstituted in the mid-1990s under the designation "Mediterranean Partners for Cooperation." Countries included were Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Morocco and Tunisia. Jordan subsequently joined as a Partner. Over the years the OSCE has convened a score of seminars, conferences and fora focused on the Mediterranean. In fact, the OSCE and the Government of Jordan will host a seminar later this month on "The comprehensive approach to security: The OSCE experience and its relevance for the Mediterranean region." Additionally, a contact group was established in the mid-1990s to provide the opportunity for participating States and the six Mediterranean Partners to maintain dialogue on pertinent Mediterranean issues. Periodic meetings of the group are typically held at ambassadorial level.

Turning to the subject of today's briefing, let me make absolutely clear that none of the Mediterranean Partners for Cooperation have committed themselves to any of the OSCE commitments. I would also note that while the Helsinki Commission has followed the evolution of the Mediterranean dimension of the OSCE, we do not have analysts monitoring the human rights situation in these states. Thus the convening of today's briefing.

I would note that the Partner countries are party to a wide range of international conventions on human rights. In checking one widely used indicator of freedom, I found that only one of the countries has consistently been deemed to be free, another has emerged as free and the remainder, with one exception, have progressed from not free to partially free.

Introducing the panelists for today's briefing in the order of their presentations,

- Frank Smyth is Washington Representative for the Committee to Protect Journalists
- Karen Hanrahan is the Director of Advocacy for Middle East and North Africa, Amnesty International USA
- Joe Stork is the Washington Director for the Middle East and North Africa division of Human Rights Watch